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Romantic Tendencies in the novels of William Godwin

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ROMANTIC TENDENCIES IN THE NOVELS OF WILLIAM GODWIN

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I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY

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THE ROMANTIC TENDENCIES IN THE NOVELS

---of---

William Godwin.

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PART ONE.

The Revolutionist.

Many men have proved, in the course of their literary careers, the truth of the saying that "an author does not write about a subject because he understands it, but understands it afterwards because he has written about it." To an inspired genius alone the saying has no meaning; to a man in whom intelligence and enthusiasm serve instead of genius, it expresses a life-lesson There is, of course, the author who does not understand his subject either before or after he has written about it, but the slip-shod, superficial writer, or the insincere rhetorician, has no just claim to the title of author--- he is a producing machine outside of our consideration. When an idea is recorded in permanent form, when it may be visualized in every relative part, and every relative part seen in its elemental functions,--then alone, except by the great creative imagination, can it be conprehended. It is then a fact. Not only is its symmetry or deformity evident, but its very nature is revealed in every movement. The author may judge it as a mother may her child; intellect or reason supplants or supplements enthusiasm in contemplation of the matured idea, just as judgement does love in a mother's regard for the in-

fant grown to manhood.

Just so did William Godwin judge his own theories as h he gave them a local habitation and a name. He was an author who understood a subject afterwards, because he had written upon it,--and more, he was one who did not hide his judgement under a semblance of enthusiasm, but followed its dictates openly and unflinchingly. When in the second edition of the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, he retracted some of the applications he had made of his theories, the cry of inconsistency arose; and when *St. Leon* and *Fleetwood* affected to praise the domestic affections and the institution of marriage as it was practiced in England, the superficial judgement of the public*fixed the epithet upon him. But is he to be condemned as inconsistent, insincere ? By all means, no,--his is the inconsistency that saves the world from the consequences of an infinite number of hasty loves and enthusiasms. It is sincerity in the pursuit of truth and perfection, or whatever you may think of as the consummation of the figure you have in mind. The pursuit is full of pathetic incidents in life as well as in Godwin's literary career; for to the human mind there is infinite pathos in finding unworthy ~~either~~ the subject either of love or enthusiasm.

The ground of his condemnation is not insincerity or inconsistency of purpose. He sought always the truth, and found not his purpose but his accomplishment unworthy. There are sentimental critics who would seem to wish the author

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*See Obituary: Wm. Godwin. Gentleman's Mag. June 1836.
Preface to St. Leon.
Preface to Fleetwood.

strong enough in his enthusiasm, absorbed enough in his devotion, to follow it blindly to the end,-- who would admire this sort of thing as apparent greatness. To them, in the course of his modification of enthusiasm according to reason, he becomes petty, uninteresting and ineffective. But not to others.

The first and only complete formulation of Godwin's theories,--for ~~after all~~ he was a philosopher above all else and could not as completely express himself in either drama, biography, poetry, essay or novel as in a philosophical treatise,-was his Enquiry concerning Political Justice. In that he has combined, as Hazlitt suggests * the ideas of the stoic and the Christian philosopher: in defining Justice he has made reason supreme over every consideration. His fundamental idea is that justice is necessary to the happiness of humanity, and is to be brought about by teaching men its nature. He has considered man as a perfect being,-- or rather, he has not considered man at all; he has considered the abstraction of reason and virtuous desire, the angel or god which he conceived as man. As Hazlitt further suggests, his philosophy would be all very well if man only were an angel or a god. But he is not. Secure in the belief that humanity needs only instruction, he proceeds, didactically rather than persuasively, to set forth the evils of the political and social systems under which his generation is living. It is here that our interest in him as a factor in the Romantic movement is first aroused, for the keynote of Romanticism is revolt, whatever form it may take. Moreover, in the novels following this treatise, which have more literary ~~inter-~~

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* Wm. Hazlitt. Spirit of the Age; Wm. Godwin.

~~ary~~ interest perhaps, than the *Enquiry concerning Political Justice*, many of the same revolutionary purposes may be traced.

The first great principle of justice, according to the *Enquiry* , is political individualism. Man is neither inherently virtuous or vicious, but is formed by the political institutions under which he lives. *1. Under existing institutions he is viciously formed. In *Caleb Williams*, a novel written four years later to express this idea to a wide audience which a political treatise would never reach, he has attempted an illustration " of the modes of domestic and unrecorded despotism by which man becomes the destroyer of man." *2. The purpose involves many of what may be called the subordinate phases of the general problem. The evil of an aristocratic system of society, under monarchical government, is probably the most important "lesson" which he attempts to teach in this book. Caleb, the hero, a lad whose only crime is an inconsiderate curiosity, learns his master's guilt and is made the victim of his persecution. He is falsely judged guilty of theft, because his employer's word has more weight than his own; he is sent to prison; his reputation is blackened far and wide; his accusation of Falkland is scoffed at. " Six thousand a year shall protect a man from accusation, and the validity of an impeachment shall be superseded, because the author of it is a servant! * 3. Hunted from place to place, his reputation, his friendships, his freedom, destroyed, his is a dark story of injustice, possible only because of the inequality of classes under a monarchical and aristocratic system.

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*1. Pol. Just. Book1. Chap 111.
2. Caleb Williams. Preface. Oct. 29, 1795.
3. Caleb Williams. Geo. Newnes Ed. p. 334.

He also attacks the prisons. In Political Justice he launched his attack against the penal system of England, and further, against the prisons. His idea was to imprison the criminal, but to seek also to reform him and give him back his liberty. Prisons served not only to keep men unfit for society, but to make them so. He calls them "schools of vice." *1. We saw the jail doors opening to Caleb, an underling, with all possible ease; but of course circumstantial evidence is necessarily damning, not only then, but now. If we had followed him, however, into the "lockup" there would not have been the slightest thought of " of course". The foul living conditions, the effect of association, instances of personal arrogance and injustice in the officers, delay in trial, and the workings of unjust laws are protrayed here with a horrible vividness that has in later times been the instrument of Dickens. *2. Godwin has made use of the opportunity to point out the significance of his descriptions and observations by reference to his sources.*3. He

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*1.Pol. Just. Book Vll. Chap. Vl.

2.Cf. the descriptions of prison conditions in Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield, also.

3."An incident exactly similar to this (a revolting bit of horse-play which Caleb's associates furnished)was witnessed by a friend of the author a few years since at Newgate." "a story extremely similar to this is to be found in the Newgate Calendar, Vol.1.p 382," he adds, after narrating the unjust imprisonment and death of a comrade from ill-treatment during the delay for trial."See Howard on Prisons for verification of the descriptions of living conditions," he recommends, and quotes further and old law " in the case of peine forte et dure, providing that 'the water to be administered to the prisoners shall be taken from the next sink or puddle nearest the jail.' See State Trials, Vol 1. Anno. 1615.

leaves no doubt of the reality of the conditions he describes, and in powerful invective further harrows up the indignation of his readers. *1. Later, when Caleb attempts to make accusation against Mr. Falkland, the magistrate shows the farce of the theory that all men are equal in the eye of the law. " A fine time a year it would be if a servant could trump up accusations against a gentleman of six thousand a year! You will go to the gallows for that if you don't for the charge against you," he promises; which Caleb comes near doing.

Those who favored Godwin's political principles hailed the new novel as a proof that his abstract speculations were "grounded in, and sanctioned by, an intimate knowledge of, and rare felicity in, the development of the actual vicissitudes of human life," and as a great destructive force in the revolt against existing conditions. Since he succeeded in making a book whose interest and passion is appreciated even today, and whose literary merit is beyond question, the effect of its teachings was for a time widespread.

St. Leon, his next novel, *Fleetwood* and *Mandeville*, which followed later, give scanty attention to these particular phases of political institutions, however. The injustice of visible and permanent false inequalities among men, and the injustice of the penal code, gave way to other considerations, for, as we shall see later, Godwin soon began to take into account the necessity of government and social inequalities. Another issue, linking the interest of moral with political individualism receives persistent demonstrations, both in *Caleb Williams* and in the later novels: that is, the Established Church." In religious

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*1. See next page for foot-note.

matters, according to Political Justice, individual judgement is the true criterion. For morality id the result of judgment and voluntary obedience to the dictates of reason, not of force. This is the first note of the "passionate irreligion" which he forever advocated, and which was the result of his study for the ministry. Voltaire, Rousseau and Paine had declared the forms of the Church antagonistic to the moral development and happiness of man. An enthusiastic hamanitarian like them, Godwin also attacked religion. Political government and religious government, alike, should be for the good of all, through the good of the individual. " God himself," he declares, has no right to be a tyrant!" How much less, then, his servants! But under the existing conditions, the Church of Christianity has caused injustice and cruelty, ignorance and slavery, not a beneficent morality.

St. Leon and Mandeville offer perhaps the best illustrations of the donunciation of the Church. St. Leon gives a lengthy exploitation of the horrors of the Spanish Inquisition, by which the hero is imprisoned in the course of his adventures. His persecution, by a good man who sought only for St. Leon's salvation "satisfied him that a man, while he practiced every vice that can disgrace human nature, might imagine he was doing God service." "God of mercy and benevolence!" St. Leon cries, after describing the execution of theinnocents in the

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*1. (Footnote from page 6) " 'Thank God,' exclaims the Englishman, 'we have no Bastille! Thank God, with us no man can be punished without a crime!' Unthinking wretch! is that a country for liberty where thousands languish in dungeons and fetters? Go, go ignorant fool! visit the scenes of our prisons!witness their unwholesomeness their filth, the tyranny of their governors,,the misery of their inmates! After that show me the man shameless enough to triumph and say England has no Bastille! This is society. This is the object, the distribution of justice, which is the end and aim of human reason." Caleb Williams.Newnes Ed.p 217-218.

name of the Church," is it possible that this scene should be regarded as thy triumph, and a sacrifice acceptable in Thy sight!" *1. "These are thy works, superstition! This is the genuine and proper operation of what is called Christianity!" _Mandeville_ is directed against the Roman Catholic Church, rather than against churches as a whole. As the most closely organized of all, it has caused more acts of tyranny and cruelty. He begins his book with a vivid and lengthy ddscription of the Irish Catholic massacres. As the most formal church, it enslaves the most the minds of its members. The sole purpose of the Rev. Hilkiah Bradford in the novel, is to embody this passionate denunciation of Catholicism. He maintains that 'the Pope is Anti-Christ'; that the Church is a church of idolatry, of pride and pomp, of temporal magnificence, of sanguinary methods, murder, assassination, burning; that the whole system of membership and priesthood, of worship and confession, is one calculated to enslave the understanding, and to reduce conscience to subjection under this despotic church authority. It defeats, he declares, every possibility of personal righteousness and individual morality. Clifford, the exemplary, commits his one crime in joining the Papal church, the equivalent, under Godwin's presentation, of selling his conscience to the Devil. *2.

But in his attack upon the Church, Godwin does not in any way attack the teachings of Christianity. It is the falseness, the injustice and ineffectiveness of the methods of its propagation which worked in him this "passionate irreligion."

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*1. St. Leon. Vol. 3. P 246-235-270.

2. One of the many dissertations combined in the _Life of Chaucer_ expounds in great detail the evils of the Romish Church. Chap.IV

He believed in the redemption of the world by the Son of God, as a high imaginative and poetic truth,-- and he was one of the first to attain this height. Others accepted the fact as literally true, or rejected it as a wicked poetic fiction. To Godwin it meant that the world would be redeemed from the hell of contending egotistical emotions by self-sacrifice, symbolized by the death of Christ; or, to express it in his own terms, that the world would be preserved from political injustice by the conformity of all to individual justice.*1. It has been many ages since a political philosopher reached such a true conclusion, and it will be many more before the truth of this doctrine which he advanced will be questioned. It is the foundation in the present day, of common moral philosophy. Reason has supplanted superstition. Every man's right is to do his duty, that is, justice as he sees it,-- and to see as much of it as he can,-- under no coercion of external authority. Godwin's great lesson was this complete religious individualism, to be attained through reason, leading to knowledge of the truth.

But this personal individualism is a vague general proposition which rests upon other phases than religious government. The development of theindividual is hampered, to his mind, not only by political and religious government, but by the tyranny resulting from inequality of possessions. That is the cause of injustice in the same way as is inequality of rank; and superfluity of possessions necessitates a sort of slavery. There is no true criterion of ownership but necessity. A piece of bread

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* 1. Cf. Goldsmith's *The Traveler.*
"How small of all that human hearts endure,
That part, which laws or kings can cause or cure."

belongs to the man who needs it most, *1. an impartial judgement shall decide which does . If only mankind could attain impartial judgement! But alas! though two men may need the same thing equally, in real life one feels his need much more keenly, and one can express his much more forcibly than the other. Where is the justice, or the possibility of justice, under no judge? A member of the ideal commonwealth lends another a hundred dollars for immediate and pressing use, and when he applies for it again, the borrower still has more need of it than he, and retains it for his own especial, that is, the tantamount good. Two persons agree to live together on terms of pure equality and mutual assistance, but when it comes to the trial, one of them finds the other always insists that he is the hungeriest, and therefore entitled to possession of the bread, or that he is the weariest, and therefore entitled to exemption from the labor. The modest assurance which was not the least indispensable virtue in the proposed equality code is, in practice, a scheme for the enterprising and cunning at the expense of the credulous and honest. Reason is not an infallible or safe rule of conduct.

But it is the truest guide. Caleb Williams gave an illustration which we have already cited, of the inequality which may be created by property accumulation. The description of the band of theives into whose hands Caleb falls after escape from prison, is a curious application of these same socialistic ideas. Although the author does not go so far as to justify them completely, he at least appeals to the reader's sympathy in their behalf. It is an illustration, so far as Godwin could

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*1. Pol. Just. Book 8.

find one in real life, of an individualistic community; the ideal democratic government." They could form plans and execute them. They consulted their inclinations. They did not impose upon themselves the task,-- as is too often the case in human society,-- of seeming tacitly to approve that from which they suffer most; or, which is worse, of persuading themselves that all the wrongs they suffered were right, but were at open war with their oppressors." "One man steals in one way, and another in another. For my part I go upon the highway, and take from any stranger I meet what is a hundred to one he may well spare. But I have as much conscience as another man.--I have no friendly feeling for people that have neither justice nor principle." Mandeville voices the conclusion of Godwin's own ideas. The frailties of human nature, and the consequent impracticability of establishing such a communistic system of property grows clear to him. He understands the subject because he has written about it, and followed out with his unflinching thoroughness, its application in detail. Therefore he honestly amends his theory. He is not like the doctor who, when the medicine did not agree with the sick baby, threw away the baby. He put aside the medicine. He decided that reason was not the cure,-- not the governor of property. He modified the theory to agree with the conditions of human nature. Reason, he figured out, is the guide to the use of property,-- which is common sense to the most parsimonious of us.

In Mandeville , his sweet sister, Henrietta, the symbol of all truth and beauty in the story, teaches the young hero that a man of wealth is but the steward of wealth. He has the great power of applying its use, not the possession of it. Assistance of the poor is not a matter of charity, but of justice

still. Clifford, the fair Henrietta's companion picture, is the echo of Godwin's early theories, a visionary idealist to be applauded in his denunciations of wealth, and in his socialistic ideas. The keen-minded Mandeville sees the mischief in the arguments, the poor appeal of an equally unjust poverty, and compromises in his ideas just as Godwin himself has, by making reason only a respected advisor, and a wise man of wealth a benefit.

We turn to St. Leon for the illustration of the second phase, the slavery necessitated by a superfluity of possessions. The hero, a man of rank, who by his folly is reduced to humble life, is given the philosopher's stone, the power of unlimited wealth and of eternal life to enjoy it. He is fitted by early enjoyment and by contrasting experience to appreciate the gift to its fullest. But it brings him only infinite grief. He is its slave from first to last; worse, its victim. The book is filled, from cover to cover with expressions that might make proverbs for the modern philosopher. " How cumbrous is magnificence! The modern man is the only free!" *1. " Let us increase and secure our happiness by diminishing our wants." *2. " O poverty! if these are the delights that attend thee, willingly will I resign the pomp of palaces and the splendor of rank to whoever shall deem them worthy of his acceptance! Henceforth, I desire only to dedicate myself to the simplicity of nature and genuine sentiments of the heart--- wealth serves no other purpose than to deprave the soul, and adulterate the foundations of delight." *3.

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*1. St.Leon. Ed. 1841. p 85. Cf. Pol. Just. Book 8.Chap.4.
2. " " " " p 98.
3. " " " " p 101.

"What a sovereign contempt was impressed upon me for wealth and all its train of ostentation." *1.

In supplementing condemnation of superfluous property by a description of the contrasting good, Godwin strikes a characteristic romantic note. He praises simple and rural life. The same command to " shun the gay liscentious crowd" *2. that sounded through the poetry of the Wartons, of Dyer, of Gray, and rang out loud and clear in the philosophy of Rousseau and Paine, is reiterated in Godwin's novels. The tranquil little villiage in Wales, with its simple and guileless people, where Caleb finds refuge and the only real happiness of his miserable career, gives a first hint of the author's tastes. It is a bit of sweet natural peace in the midst of a tale otherwise all gloom and terror; it is a mirage on the prairies, an oasis in the desert, a rift of blue between dark clouds, a single star in a stormy sky. The effect is ever so great a relief,-- that is, the effect of the <u>idea</u> is; the idea is not presented with half the delicate art it deserves. In <u>St. Leon</u> there is a series of such ideal pictures which linger in one's mind. After St. Leon's ruin and the long illness that follows, Marguerite establishes her little family in the heart of a Swiss canton, where artificial tastes, and idle and visionary pursuits are dismissed for the enjoyment of the genuine principles of human nature. A simple and busy life amid the glorious scenes of nature, in company with all one loves,-- that is happiness. And there we see a peasantry more peaceful and less oppressed than perhaps any other that the earth can exhibit. They

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*1. St. Leon Ed. 1841. p 231.
2. Thos. Warton. The Hermitage.

are erect and independent, at once friendly and fearless. * 1.

Godwin had given up long since disapproval of the "private affections," into which his abstract speculations had lead him. He saw not the error of the idea as an abstraction, but the error of his primary conception of man as an unimpassioned intellectual creature. He became acquainted with an element in human nature which could not be eliminated, whose power he had not at first known. *2. He says right honestly, " I apprehend domestic and private affections inseparable from the nature of man, and from what may be styled the culture of the heart, and am fully persuaded that they are not incompatible with a profound and active sense of justice in the mind of him that cherishes them.--- The man who lives in the midst of domestic relations will have many opportunities of conferring pleasure, minute in the detail, yet not trivial in the amount, without interferring with the purposes of general benevolence. Nay," he concludes in complete surrender, " by kindling his sensibility, and harmonising his soul, they may be expected, if he is endowed with a liberal and manly spirit, to render him more prompt in the service of strangers and the public," *3.

The yet simpler rural life after the removal of the St. Leon family to the shores of Lake Constance seems to contain the essence of pastoral beauty. The hero, in the midst of his happy domestic circle, where love and intelligence unite to ap-

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*1. Fleetwood, Ed. 1841. p 85

2. John Stuart Mill had in his life a parallel experience. He was never taught any religion but reason, but in later life learned that there were emotional elements in human nature that would not be denied, and modified reason with faith and affection.

3. Preface St. Leon, Ed. 1841.

preciate the beauties about them makes a picture which lingers in our memories as it did in his own. In Mandeville in the vision of Henrietta in Mrs. Willis's humble cottage on the river bank, where Nature and simple human art combined, and industry ruled, the brother sees a Garden of Eden. All was clean, healthful, blithesome and contented. How the artificial charm of a brilliant court, or the gloomy magnificence of a city mansion fades beside this! Fleetwood sees a consoling vision of peace as he approaches the retreat of M. Ruffigny. A little house among the trees in a valley glowing with the light of the setting sun, and an old man in his garden beside it, is the scene, as he calls it, of divine tranquility. And oh how fervently did the Romanticists of Godwin's time long for just this tranquil state!

One can hardly separate this praise of pastoral life, moreover, from the author's romantic attitude toward Nature. A new appreciation was characteristic of the times, but Godwin adds to it a new phase. It is not only for enjoyment of beauty that he turns to her. He finds a formative influence, ~~the correspondence~~, a direct emotional impulse in the companionship of Nature. " Nature is always at bottom a friend to the unfortunate," Mandeville says, "and if she does not relieve his sorrows, at least benumbs the sense." *1. To him, she had been also a formative influence. His melancholy temperament found sympathy in the pattering of rain, the roaring of winds, and the pelting of the storm. He felt a cherished pleasure in the sight of a bare and sullen heath. Henrietta's "tenement in fairyland" would have changed his whole nature, could he have lived there. Tranquillized

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*1. Mandeville. Ed 1815. Vol. 3. p 146.

by a peaceful scene, he is temporarily reconciled toward the erstwhile object of his hatred; and torn by tempestuous feelings, he plunges into the wildest parts of the forest to work off his mood under Nature's influence. That was also Mr. Falkland's habit in his wildest distress of mind. He was "sometimes seen climbing among the rocks, reclining motionless for hours together upon the edge of the precipice, or lulled into a kind of nameless lethargy of despair by the dashing of the torrents--- seeming to be delighted with that uproar of the elements which partially called off his attention from the discord and dejection which occupied his own mind."*1. This flight to Nature for consolation and calmness is a popular tendency, which Byron and Goethe *2. illustrated many times in their own lives and their heroes. St. Leon and Fleetwood both represent the same attitude. Fleetwood was filled with emotion and enthusiasm by his early associations with wild romantic scenes. He was not the lover of Nature who viewed her from his window; she was his companion: he saw in her the image of life, she became a "feeling" to him. She was the inspiration of revery, an attitude which permeates the work of Wordsworth and Byron, Rousseau and Hazlitt, and many others. She inspired great day-dreams, and worked in him an extreme sensibility, not only to pleasant, but to unpleasant things, which extended to a boundless emotional human sympathy. After bitterly disappointing experience, his unhappiness spends its force with her. St. Leon also found his refuge with her. Her wildest moods afforded him the expression of his own feelings. A sort of Prometheus-like defiance

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*1. Caleb Williams. Newnes Ed. p 149.

2. " Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh,
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest du auch."

of the elements served to steady his spirit, and finally "Nature found her way to his heart, and made a man of him." *1.

Finding Nature so closely connected with individual development, an educator, so to speak, it seems natural that she should be a religious influence. When a man gives himself up to the contemplation of the beauty, the grandeur, the sublimity of her scenes, the question comes, Who is the Maker of all this? Is He not a Being of omnipotence and benevolence? With his sympathetic eye he can see God in all his works. He is in spirit a Deist, worshiping in the great Church of the Universe with a spontaneous and fervent religion growing in his heart. We see the contrast of this with the working of the despotic Church government which Godwin hated. We see themoral individualism which he longed to see established, developing under theinfluence of this real education of the heart. Man under no tyranny of religious law, unchained from the slavery of ambition for wealth and ostentation, the faithful steward of what he may possess, living in simple rural happiness, instructed by the spirit which informs all of Nature's works, is an ideal of attainable perfection. Godwin's revolutionary theories are no longer wholly destructive. He has formulated a practical model for reconstruction. Following step by step the workings of his doctrines, as he gave them form, he has seen the impracticability of his first abstract enthusiasm, and without any doubt of its fundamental truth, has adapted it to the facts of reality as his reason has directed. Sincere in his faith in the benefits of political individualism, could it be attained among a perfected race, he resigns himself

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*1. St. Leon. Ed. 1841. p 90.

to the cultivation of the moral individualism which alone can bring about this perfectibility. He has learned to understand his subject because he has written about it. He descends from the realms of inspiration to the level of common sense, there to teach other men to rise. It is not because he loses courage, but because he found the experiment, in spite of its pleasures for him, productive of nothing but curiosity and misdirected practice. He sees that the equipment for the venture, the perfect machine and guiding intelligence, are necessities which he has taken for granted, but which few have. So he descends to teach the multitude how to build their machines and how to guide them.

The contrariness of human nature is evidenced in his reception among the crowd. While men look at him with some idle curiosity, as one who has achieved an interesting feat, they wait in attention upon his practical instructions for a little while, and drift away, one by one, each about his business or in pursuit of a new curiosity. They all have some general notion of his methods,-- they lack, as a majority, the ambition to work them out for their own personal use. The erstwhile dweller among the clouds is left with a few faithful apprentices and the crowd passes him by with an occasional glance.

PART TWO.

The Determinist.

It must be granted that Godwin's novels are of interest for their historic value rather than for their intrinsic merit. Yet, to be paradoxical, their historical value rests upon literary merit. In the matter of subject Godwin has not added materially to the sum total of literature, but in method of composition he made as great a contribution to the modern standards of literary art, perhaps, as any other one author. His heritage in the forms of the novel was three-fold: the picaresque romance, or tale of adventure, which may be traced back through English literature to the Spanish stories of Cervantes, Aleman and others; the sentimental novel, popularized by MacKenzie and Sterne, ~~perhaps~~,; and the Gothic romance like Walpole's _Castle of Otranto_. He incorporated the three in what may be called, in view of the revolutionary purpose, exposed in the preceding chapter, a sort of a social treatise. Primarily a philosopher, he wrote to express a great lesson. He was the founder of the school of purpose novelists.

The idea which actuated his desire for the reformation of government and society was determinism. He believed with all his heart that man is neither inherently virtuous nor vicious; that he is formed by the circumstances of his life; that every incident brings consequent incidents. The same idea guides his hand in his novels, in the presentation of character, of plot, and of setting. The introduction of this new element of philos-

ophy into the composition of the novel necessarily creates a great innovation. Before this time the novel may be called loosely epical; it tended to be a series of incidents which had no clear-cut beginning or ending, nor very conscious motivation. It ambled, rambled, sidestepped, dragged along. But Godwin started out with a purpose in view. He sat himself down to think how hecould accomplish his purpose. He conceived a general idea which would give the desired effect. He hunted about till he had just the man to fill theplace; then he set about mapping out the details of the career which should lead all these to the proposed end. The result was a pertinacity and unity of design new to the majority of novels. But let us trace more carefully the use of the more common romantic characteristics, and see how his authorship has accomplished the innovation.

The three types out of which Godwin's novels grew, the sentimental, the picaresque, the Gothic, furnished respectively emphasis upon character, upon incident, and upon setting. He illustrates in his work the salient characteristics of each form, modified according to his purpose. For example, let us examine his characters. Fleetwood, the New Man of Feeling, offers the most obvious illustration of the man of "exquisite sensibilities." Like Sterne's Uncle Toby *1. who "scarce had the heart to retaliate upon a fly," Fleetwood could not endure even to ensnare a harmless little fish. *2. His rescue of the peasant and the lamb and quick response to the pathos of the love affair of the luck-

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*1. Tristram Shandy.

2. "In very early youth I had been seduced, first by a footman of my father's and afterward by my tutor, who was a great lover of the art, to join in the excursion of angling. But after a short trial, I abjured the amusement forever, and it was one among the causes of the small respect I entertained for my tutor that he was devoted to so idle and unfeeling an avocation." Fleetwood.Ed. 1841.p 33.

less William are used as early illustrations of the same "extreme sensibility, not only to pleasant but to unpleasant things, which extended to a boundless emotional human sympathy." But this does not hang in the air, a mere suspended fact. It is founded, you remember, by the early education which Nature had given him. His response to every slight incident of his married life, and his susceptibility to the guile of Gifford, are likewise carefully accounted for. They result directly from the experiences which have preceded. Falkland and Audley are the products of birth and education calculated to cultivate the finest and most delicately balanced natures. Caleb Williams, in spite of his efforts, is the product of external circumstances. In Mandeville early experience and environment create a moody temperament which evolves a creature dominated by hatred and unhappiness. St. Leon is made exquisitely sensitive to the charms of wealth and rank by early training and later contrasting experience. The exaggerated sensibility which often amounts to sentimentality is explained and accounted for by carefully planned delineation of cause and effect. It was Godwin's purpose to show realistic evolution of character. His faith in determinism explains his methods.

In the larger conception of Fleetwood and Mandeville however, Godwin especially earns the epithet " sentimental". He dwells upon the emotional until he becomes "mawkish and morbid". But the fact must not be overlooked that even in this there is a purpose of showing individual justice and injustice, worked out by most careful attention to psychological cause and effect. The author has passed from the school of the sentimentalists who, like Rousseau, sit down by Lake Geneva and watch their tears drip into

the water, asking the spectators to sympathise with the wrongs -- real or imaginary,--- which they have endured. The wrongs which Godwin depicts are real. The effect upon his characters is vital. It is not idle sympathy that he seeks. His purpose is to exterminate such wrongs from the world. He has used the sentimentalists' old property for his own purpose of persuading and arousing. He was primarily the determinist.

The result of his method was consistency with of real life in character evolution. The static condition of creations like Pamela or Tom Jones, for example, was impossible in Godwin's heroes and heroines. This was one contribution to modern standards of the novel.

The contributions of the picaresque novel are tempered in somewhat the same manner. Godwin was not concerned with the tale of adventure except as it led to the end he had in mind. The plots of Caleb Williams and of St. Leon are plots of adventure and intrigue. The first of these, particularly, is a "master-piece of invention and execution." *1. The romantic love of personal fame embodied in the character of Falkland, and the restless and inquisitive spirit of Caleb furnish the motives for a tale of arduous persecution. Falkland, in the first part of the novel, is the center of a social group which forces him into crime. He is persecuted by the jealousy of the villainous Mr. Tyrell. The character of a villain from the upper classes is fairly typical of the picaresque romance. The incidents of his persecutions of Falkland furnish an exciting tale of adventure, but, (with due apology to Wm. Hazlitt for the difference of

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*1. Wm. Hazlitt. Spirit of the Age. Wm. Godwin.

opinion) serves chiefly to explain the more important issues of Caleb Williams' story. He is the lower class, itinerant hero, but his adventures are motivated; he is driven to prison, escapes to fall into the hands of the band of thieves, attempts to leave the country when their strong-hold is raided, is arrested again, escapes, finds a hiding place under the disguise of a Jewish literary hack, is tracked, finds refuge again, disguised as a hunchback, and finally recaptured; ~~etc.~~ and so on, ad infinitum. There is a wealth of legitimate picaresque machinery in the novel, but it is not used merely for its own sake; it is a part of a plan. The incidents are motivated in accordance with the author's main idea of showing Caleb a victim of society.

The same sort of motivation is evident in the other novels. St. Leon becomes the wandering and adventurous hero because of the malevolent power of his wealth. He is driven from country to country, from one adventure to the next, in the real old Spanish fashion ; although, throughout, he is the victim of the curse of superfluous property. Even Fleetwood, actuated by the unreasoning cynicism to which society has reduced his sensitive soul, and Mandeville, the victim of his own injustice and hatred, may be admitted to the same class of adventurous heroes. Considering plot in itself, all four of the novels may be judged the offspring of the novel of adventure. Godwin was not content in any case, however, to string together a series of incidents for the sake of their own interest. He differs from his predecessors because his conception of the development of character was involved in his work, and incident was of value to him in teaching his great lessons, only because it was the cause or effect of character development. *1. "Our virtues and our vices

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*1. Pol. Just. Book 1. Chap. 3.

may be traced to the incidents which make up our lives, and if these incidents could be divested of every improper tendency, vice would be extirpated from the world." Determinism alters his use of the characteristics of the picaresque novel just as it had modified the contributions of the sentimental novel.

The result was that unity of action which Aristotle *2. first pointed out as necessary, and which all modern authorities uphold as indispensible. Poe is a deciple of Godwin's who formulated very definely the iddas of his predecessor. *1. Walter Pater also bases his theories of style in general upon this same motivation. *3.

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*1. "Plot is very imperfectly understood, and has never been rightly defined. Many persons regard it as a mere complexity of incidents. In its most rigorous acceptation, it is *that from which no component part can be removed, and in which none of the component parts can be displaced, without ruin to the whole*; and although a sufficiently good plot may be constructed without attention to the whole rigor of this definition, still it is a definition which the true artists should always endeavor to consummate in his works.--Godwin and Bulwer are the best constructors of plot in English literature. The former has left a preface to his *Caleb Williams*, in which he says that the novel is *written backwards*; the author first completing the second volume, in which the hero is involved in a maze of difficulties, and then casting about him for sufficiently probable cause of these difficulties, out of which to concoct volume the first." Poe. Works. Ed. 1896. Vol. 8. P. 329ff.

2. "A plot is not one merely because the hero of it is one. Numberless events cannot be connected into one event, nor the actions of one man into one action. Plot should be the imitation of an action that is one and entire, the parts so connected that if any one of them be transposed or taken away the whole will be destroyed or changed." *Aristotle Poetics* Chap. 8. Godwin shows his acquaintance with the theories of Aristotle in the *Life of Chaucer*, but the form of his novels is explained by his own original thinking rather than by ~~his~~ Aristotles teachings.

3. Walter Pater; *Essay on Style*."In literary as in all other arts, structure is all important, felt or painfully missed, everywhere--that architectural conception of work, which forsees the end in the beginning,

(note continued on next page.)

The effect of deterministic theories is illustrated more subtly, however, by Godwin's manipulation of setting than by his adaptation of either character or plot. It has been suggested in Part One that Nature is recognized as a formative influence upon character. It may be interesting, nevertheless, to investigate further into the influence of setting. The Gothic novel had employed a vast machinery of tumble-down castles, deserted wings, mysterious doors and hiding places, of owls and ravens, storms and apparitions, cold graves and midnight pilgrimages. The strange and terrible was a fertile source of interest and suggestion. It was this imaginative element of Gothicism, and the use of settings to heighten artistic effect, that appealed to Godwin. *1. He used both natural and supernatural elements, without detracting from the terror of the situation, or, on the other hand, from the sense of reality and truth of his fundamental idea. He appealed to the imagination by a mysterious trunk, an inhuman monster, a hideous hag bent on midnight murder, a dank prison cell, mysterious persecution and unexpected encounters which, which, in *Caleb Williams*, serve chiefly as devices to maintain interest. The departure from the supernatural into probabilities that seemed of supernatural portent is the beginning of the modern detective story, of which *Caleb Williams* is the first example--- a not inconsiderable contribution to literature, for it opened up a broad new field.

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*1. Cf. Life of Chaucer. Chap. VIII Gothicism.

(Note continued from page 24)
and never loses sight of it, and in every part is conscious of all the rest, till the last sentence does but, with undimished vigor, unfold and justify the first--a condition of literary art, which---I shall call the necessity of *mind in* style."

In St. Leon the supernatural is admitted, but not much used. A mysterious old man in a closed summer house, the secret of the philosopher's stone, the grotto-labratory for experiments in the black art, the negro servant, the black dog, the stormy night and uncontrollable mob before the burning house, the dungeons of the Inquisition, the dark gloomy vaults beneath Bethlem Gabor's isolated stronghold, where the wind whistled and the flaring torch light fell upon a rusty bolted door, and the hideous distorted face of the jailor--- these are details rich in Gothic imagination. It is worthy of note that the author depends so little upon the supernatural where the oportunity is so excellent; but his purpose was to conform to reality as much as possible. The truth of the general conception is emphasized by the one impossible instrument, the philosopher's stone. "I can prove to you," Godwin seems to say, "that even infinite wealth and endless life to enjoy it results in misery, not happiness." The rest of the setting which is Gothic in character, is used to bring out the reality of this misery.

Mandeville shows the author's perfected adaptation of Gothic instruments, however,. In it, as in Caleb Williams, realism is carried to such enormities that it becomes romantic. The author uses the scenes of a massacre for a back ground. The hero is put in an old and spacious mansion, founded on a rock. Only one wing of the dilapidated house is occupied, the rest resigned to owls and bitterns which make weird noises from behind mysterious closed doors. The court yard is a rank growth. The eternal dashing of the sea, which surrounds the promontory on three sides, sounds in his ears, and the only prospect is the barren heath which stretches out on the fourth side. The whole is permeated

with a chill depressing atmosphere; thick fogs and mists obscure the scene, and feeble candles pierce the noon-day darkness. Somewhere in the house a melancholy invalid, the soul of the place, has his retirement, and dark clad servants tiptoe about, whispering in sepulchral tones. Silence, monotony, and gloom reign. The hero, living again the scenes of horror he has witnessed, takes his only pleasure in listening to the dropping of the rain, the thundering of the waves, and the roaring of the storm. He feels a cherished solace in the sight of the bare and sullen heath. The habitation is made, by this piling up of detail for the desired effect, by this appeal of sight, sound and touch, as well as internal mood, wild, tumultuous and tragic in the midst of uneventful silence and dreariness.

The description contains the quintessence of Gothicism, in which the imaginative appeal is but strengthened by the sense of reality that supplants supernatural agents. The strange and terrible reaches its height in probabilities. The fascination of the description is that the reader identifies himself with the author, and therefore with the characters; for Godwin keeps his own attitude constantly clear; he stops to elaborate and explain, to emphasize and point out what interests him so often, that there is no opportunity for one to slip away into reflections of his own. And he maintains by the use of narration, in the first person, the sense of <u>being present</u>. Hazlitt said, I believe,*1 that he could not conceive of any one who, after having begun one of Godwin's novels, could stop without finishing it, or who, after having finished it, would not always retain the scenes in his memory as though they had happened to him. The reader slips into the char-

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*1. Wm. Hazlitt, <u>Spirit of the Age</u>. Wm. Godwin.

acter of the hero, and into the scenes where he finds himself, just as in the one from Mandeville, which was just described.

The subconscious mind reports "I feel the depression of the Mandeville house; my mind is overwhelmed by its horrors; my soul is being crushed by this environment from which I cannot escape." And there he has found the secret of the whole matter: the scene is not just a story picture put there to be wondered at, it is an essential part of the development of the story; it is a vital force in the evolution of the morbid Mandeville, a fertile field for the seed of jealousy to fall into, to produce the master-passion of hatred which is traced in his life. Until the closing sentence, " Clifford has set his mark upon me, as a token that I was his forever," the scene remains in mind, a component ~~part~~ atom in the whole construction. This is the produce of the author's determinism , again, of his belief that man is the creation of the composit experiences of his life; this is the philosopher's use of Gothic machinery.

It was this same adaptation of Gothic machinery which pointed out to later authors the possibilities of "applied setting," and which, rather than either the true Gothic or the melodramatic tragedies that preceded it, opened up the vast and varied field of literature illustrated by the *Fall of the House of Usher,* on one hand, and socialistic and problem novels, on the other.

From the three-fold types of prose fiction Godwin took, then, the salient character-plot of adventure, and the Gothic use of strange and terrible setting. Coloring his material with his own belief in determinism, he succeeded in securing a new consistent, psychological evolution of character, conscious motivation of plot, and artistic harmony of setting. These are his valuable legacies

to English literature. He has not added greatly, in the matter of subject, to the sum total of fiction, excepting in the detective story fathered by Caleb Williams, and in the suggestion for the use of setting as an active agent in plot development. He has made, however, as definite a contribution in methods of composition to modern ideas of fiction writing, as perhaps any other one author.

Part Three.

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The Novelist.

I could wish to close with statements which accord Godwin such honor, but the question would immediately arise, "Why, then, are the novels of Wm. Godwin forgotten? If they accomplish all that has been put to their credit they must be interesting. You must have overestimated their value. " But the merits I have been finding in them are those of historical value rather than of intrinsic literary interest. In revolutionary purpose, and in innovations of composition they are a part of the romantic movement in English literature. Whether or not they furnish interesting reading to us today, is another matter. Fashions change in novels as in other things, and it would be a pity if literary art made no advance over the experiments of its earlier compositions. Although Godwin blazed the trail for motivated psychological novels he could not create work that was of enduring interest. The reason may be an inferiority of native genius, or of workmanship; probably it was a combination of both. We can best consider in themselves some of the features which detracted from theinterest of Godwin's novels.

William Hazlitt speaks of Godwin *1. as " an author in the purest sense of the word," because he is a constructive writer. He takes the subject, or germ of his idea, from whatever source he may, from Nature or from books, and fills it out with

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*1. Wm. Hazlitt. <u>Spirit of the Age</u>; Wm. Godwin.

his own ideas and characters. *1. In his manner of moulding his story to a general didactic purpose, and of adapting character, plot and setting to the illustration of his theories, we have seen suggestions of the complete assimilation of any material which he received from external sources. The interesting thing about this is that he did not absorb material from all sources, as a great genius may, but that he voluntarily sought in all available ways to select, arrange and subordinate his gleanings to his purpose. His great end and aim in life was to make a book, to propogate his ideas and bring himself fame. By incessant activity of mind he accumulated stores of thought, and developed powers of expression. He shut himself up with his idea, nursed, dressed and exercised it until it grew to maturity. Each one was, for the time, his master-passion. He made up in intensity of devotion what he may have lacked in wisdom or wide experience. He watched and guided the growth of his work, ever with his ambition for it in mind, and as a result the work and the author are one and the same thing.

But it is inevitable that in limiting his material to himself, he is confined to a not very large nor varied field; considering his single-mindedness, it is most certain that the narrowness and monotony of his scope should make itself evident.*2.

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*1. See Preface to Fleetwood for ~~narration~~ account of the constructio of Caleb Williams.
Preface to St. Leon for germ and growth of St. Leon.

2. In connection with this limitation of subject matter to material which was origional with Godwin, I discover in the four books, a curious inverted ratio of interest. Hazlitt said of him "If he had cultivated a more extensive intercourse with the world, with Nature, or even with books, he would never have been where he is-- he could never have done what he has done." The verification of his surmise might be based on some statistics which I have roughly compiled. In the first two books there is no trace of interest in other authors or their work.

(Footnote continued on page 32.)

"He who draws upon his own resources easily comes to an end of his wealth." Caleb Williams and St. Leon, it is true, furnish much that is not only origional to the author, but which he has not before expressed. The tale of *~~T~~hings as They Are*, and the Rosicrucian narration, intended to " mix human feelings and passions with incredible situations; and thus render them impressive and interesting," are in a measure "new, true and important." But with these first two the enthusiast has pretty well spent his force. In the two later novels he plays variations upon the same characters and upon the theme of temperamental evolution and injustice, which he has used before, attempting to make up in force of style and continunity of feeling, what he lacks in variety of incident or ease of manner. He rings the change from Every Man in his Humour, to Every Man in his Master-passion, from comedy to tragedy. The character of elaborated sensibilities becomes a type. Caleb, born into a higher social position, and receiving a bit more soul-nurture, might make a very excellent New Man of Feeling, or morbid Mandeville. Mallision and Gifford are twin-villains; and Clifford and Kendrick, noble and long-suffering martyrs, are company in misery for each other. Emily,

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(Footnote continued from page 31.)
They arefresh from the spring of his own sincere single purpose. But as his acquaintance with books increased, their influence creeps in upon him. The spring becomes clogged with all sorts of material that is to him no more valuable than debris or rubbish. In Mandeville, the weakest of the four in genuine active interest, he quotes by figure or by author from Horace, Homer, Aristotle, Livy, Dante, Ariosto, Aesop, Solomon and many other Biblical ~~references~~ sources; from Shaftsbury, from seven or eight of Shakespeare's plays; from Spenser, Donne, Milton; from Greek and Roman political history, from Plutarch's Lives, and even from an estimate of Rembrandt's art! the display of information, the consciousness of the ideas of other men, is fatal to him. The clear waters of originality can no longer swell and bubble over; they seep through in a feble little stream.

Marguerite, Mary and Henrrietta might be a family of sweet sisters; and there is the whole set of important actors. The author shows ararer skill in presenting the minor figures of Grimes and Bethlem Gabor. Being constrained by their subordinate parts to a brevity and suggestion of description, he gives them clear cut individuality. In sufficiently minute analysis, human nature is more or less the same in every one. The sacrifice of interest to over-minute analysis is, moreover, a matter of someimportance, and characters are reduced to types by the method; they haveno particular individual attraction, excepting to the scientist or philosopher.

The failure in character-drawing extends even farther than interest; it is caused by a certain lifelessness. Not only are different sets duplications, but they are in some degree abstractions. They act alike, think alike, and worst of all, talk alike. That, I believe, is as vital a fault as any; they talk alike. The speeches of the unlettered Grimes flow with the same eloquence as those of Clifford, the scholar. The Rev. Hilkiah expresses himself in the same terms that Mandeville's little sister uses. Lack of individuality is inevitable. But the characters also act alike. The heroes, especially Fleetwood and Mandeville, furnish an obvious example. Being types of the Man of Feeling in whom one phase is aggrandized, in one misanthropy, in the other morbidity, their actions and thoughts are traced from the same pattern. They are disappointed, brood over their disappointments, grow suspicious, give apprehension full sway, go off into tantrums and finally reach a static condition, the one of remorseful happiness, the other of resigned bitterness. Caleb Williams and St. Leon run practically the same course, though in their stories there is more incident. In Mandeville and Fleetwood intensity of purpose

and careful, laborious elaboration tends to eliminate incident, from sheer want of space. Over-minute analysis takes the life out of character and story alike.

To my mind, however, the alleged monotony of character-drawing is not the fundamental difficulty. The people in Godwin's novels are not so much alike as they at first appear. The real cause is not so much the fact that they are what Johnson calls "excogitated characters," but that the word-painting of their author is dull. A multitude of digressions, an over-elaboration of analysis, unnecessary exploitation of the obvious, both weary and insult the reader, and blur his general conception. However fluent the English which Godwin uses, it is the result of cold and deliberate construction, not the flow of passion at white heat. The effect is no more vivid nor realistic, than that given by a facile brush, dipped in dull colors, however carefully detailed the presentation may be. The complexion it presents is a stupid monotone, dull and uninteresting.

Substitution of long classical terms for terse Anglo-Saxon results in circumlocution in the expression of the simplest meaning. A mother puts her daughter to bed "for the purpose of maintaining in her the requisite animal warmth,"---where is the pathos in that ? If he had said " to keep her warm," he might not have drowned the spark of sympathy in flow of words. He speaks of people who are "unhinged in their intellectual comprehension,"who should be under "corporeal restraint." It makes you raise your eyebrows and query "Indeed?" in as supercilious a tone as can be mustered at short notice. "Affairs of extensive compass", and "variance and dissolution of confidence" rouse no spark of interest. After reading some four of five hundred pages of this sort of thing,

to get a story and become acquainted with characters that might have been given vividly in half the words, tolerance becomes impatience. Interest in the ideas, smothered under their elaborate coverings, dies with a final gasp. The artist has succeeded, by excessive elaboration and lifeless colors, in destroying the realistic effect of the whole.

Viewed in retrospect, however, the novels afford considerable pleasure, ~~however~~, for the mind can discover and combine the elements which clearly and brightly suggested would make an interesting and admirable work. The sincerity and singleness of the author's purpose, and its worthiness, cannot be gainsaid. Nor, because as a novelist Godwin is practically forgotten, should the value of his contributions to theories of fiction-composition be underestimated. As an original thinker, he was honest enough to follow his revolutionary ideas of political and individual justice to practical conclusions, at the sacrifice of popular interest. He maintained and did much to propagate the theories of individualism which are incorporated in modern ideas of justice. As a man who wrote to teach a "valuable lesson", he attempted to show that virtue and vice are the result of the incidents which make up a man's life. He therefore unconsciously secured, and set the standard for, a new attention to psychological evolution of character, application of setting, and motivation of plot. As the discoverer of new fields in literary matter and the promoter of new methods in the composition of the English novel, William Godwin is one of the great men of the Romantic school.

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